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Reading Quest.org
Making Sense in Social Studies

Strategies for Reading Comprehension
History Frames/Story Maps

What Are History Frames?
Here is one of the strategies that we ought to be using in history and social studies classes because it lets us take advantage of a tool that students probably already possess ... namely, the story maps they've been using in English and Language Arts and Literature for years and years.

When looking at stories and novels, students are often asked to focus on the "elements" of story: setting, characters, plot, and theme, among others.

When we look at historical events, **we're interested in the same things**:

- where and when did the event take place?
- who was involved?
- what was the problem or goal that set events in motion?
- what were the key events?
- how was it resolved?
- and, for theme, so what? what's the universal truth, the reason this matters?

[For you science teachers our there who have stopped by this site, you might also consider taking advantage of the traditional story map (if your students are already using these maps in other classes) to have them write up their lab reports ... see the chart below.]

How Do These Frames & Maps Work?

1. **Characters**: Who are the people who were involved in this? Which ones played major roles, and which ones were minor?
2. **Setting**: Where and when did this event take place? Over what period of time?
3. **Plot**: This section is broken into three parts:
   - **Problem/Goal**: What set events in motion? What problem arose, or what were the key players after?
   - **Events/Episodes**: This is to get students to focus on summarizing...they focus on the key steps or events that capture the progress of the situation.
   - **Resolution/Outcome**: How was the problem solved? Was the goal attained? (It's probably pretty important to stress to students that they should go back to the problem or goal they identified in order to say how it was resolved or whether it was met.)
4. **Theme**. I think of this as the "so what?" of a history frame or story map. You might think of it as the universal truth or revelation, the larger meaning or importance, the moral, the "what we've learned from

this," and so on. A wonderful teacher named Donna Feary suggested to me that the theme ought to be the way that a student relates the event to his own life, and we decided that perhaps the Theme can be divided into two components:

- a universal truth
- a personal truth

Seems like a good idea!

Download and Print:

- History Frame
- Story Map
- Story Pyramid
- Somebody-Wanted-But-So
- Cross-Disciplinary Applications

How About Cross-Disciplinary Applications?

Good question. Below you'll find ideas for using the same basic story map in history, English, and science. (And couldn't it be adapted for drama, math word problems, even auto mechanics? I think so.) You can also print out the information from this chart in portable document format [pdf].

	History	English	Science
Setting	Where and When	Where and When	Time and Conditions
Characters	Who were the key players?	Who were the major (and minor?) characters taking part in the action of the story?	Equipment Used
Plot: Problem/Goal	What were the key players after? What problem were they tackling? What goal did they hope to achieve?	What event or situation sets the story in motion? What do they main characters hope to do?	What is the hypothesis the students intend to test?
Plot: Key Episodes	Key events	Key events	Steps in the experiment
Plot: Resolution/Outcome	What resulted? How was it resolved? Did the key players solve their problem or attain their goal?	Was the problem resolved, or was the character's goal met?	What results did you obtain?
	Why is this event	What is the message	So what? What do

Theme

still important to us today? What is its enduring significance? What is there to be learned from it?

for us or for the rest of humanity? What's the moral, the universal truth, the common understanding?

these results mean to us, to our understanding of science, to our ability to use science to solve real problems?

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